



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 15
Proper 18 (B)
September 5, 2021

RCL: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalm 125; James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

The reading from Proverbs tells us that we have a common heritage in the Lord. The reading describes the behavior and attitude we are called to exhibit towards one another. This attitude is also expressed in our Baptismal Covenant, as we commit to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our] neighbor as [ourselves]” (BCP, p. 305). The proverb warns us not to sow injustice but to be generous and share our bread with those without bread. The Baptismal Covenant calls us to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being” (BCP, p. 305).

- Does this theme of justice and respect for others appear in other passages of the Hebrew scriptures?
- What actions do we take personally and as a community of faith to live out this common heritage as described in the Baptismal Covenant?

Psalm 125

Psalm 125 expands on the theme of justice expressed in the Proverbs reading. The psalmist suggests that the happy (or blessed) person places trust in the Lord as creator of heaven and earth. The Lord is the source of justice and invites those who claim him as Lord to be agents of justice and to care for the poor, the stranger, the orphaned, and the widowed.

- How do you understand the meaning of happy or blessed?
- Who is the stranger in your community?

James 2: 1-10, (11-13), 14-17

The epistle reading goes to the heart of the behavior of the community. It seems that there is a problem with the rich being welcomed and treated favorably at the assembly while the poor are not as welcome. James tells them that they are making “distinctions” damaging to the faith community. The reading echoes Jesus’ teaching and that of the Torah: to love God and your neighbor as yourself. The reading today ends with James advising the community that to be a credible witness, they need to express faith in action.

- Do you agree with James that we are to be a welcoming community?
- Does the reading from James relate to the Proverbs reading and to Psalm 125?

Mark 7:24-37

The gospel today locates Jesus away from Jerusalem in Tyre. He attempts to be unnoticed and wants to keep a low profile. However, his presence is discovered and a Syrophoenician woman seeks an exorcism for her daughter. Jesus seems dismissive as they banter about food for the children and scraps that fall from the table for the dogs to eat. Jesus understands his ministry first to the children of Israel, not to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are to participate in the new creation, but that would only follow after the message had been spread in Israel. Matthew's account of this encounter records Jesus' response as acknowledging her great faith. Jesus, recognizing her faith, heals her daughter.

The second miracle, the deaf man with a speech impediment, is one that takes place privately. Jesus wishes to continue his work in anonymity. He heals the deaf man and instructs him tell no one. But as Jesus insists on silence, the man and others who are aware of what has happened go out and tell everyone they meet. The people's excitement concerning Jesus' power takes precedence over his demand for secrecy; the accounts of Jesus' healing ministry are spreading beyond Jerusalem.

- The exorcism is performed at a distance, but in the second healing, Jesus touches the man's ear, spits, and touches his tongue. Do you attach any significance to the difference – that is, from a distance or up-close and personal?
- Why might Jesus desire privacy and silence regarding the healing in the second miracle?

Paul White is in his senior year at the Iona School of Ministry in the Diocese of Texas. He and his wife, Marianne, have five children, five grandchildren, and two more grandchildren on the way. He is a graduate of Loyola University in New Orleans and the LSU School of Graduate Studies in New Orleans.